

a decline in the morale of the nation. It is a very important question: What is the effect of conventional humbug in the mores of a people, which is suggested to the young as solemn and sacred, and which they have to find out and reject later in life? The *Mahabharata*, the *Kalevala*, the *Edda*, the *Nibelungen Noth*, are other examples of popular epics which had great influence on the mores for centuries. Such poems present models of action and principle, but it is inevitable that a later time will not appreciate them and will turn them to ridicule, or will make of them only poses and affectations. The former is the effect most likely to be produced on the masses, the latter on the cultured classes. In the Greco-Roman world, at the beginning of the Christian era, various philosophic sects tried to restore and renew the ideals of Greek heroism, virtue, and religious faith, so far as they seemed to have permanent ethical value. The popular mores were never touched by this effort. In fact, it is impossible for us to know whether the writings of Seneca, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Pliny represent to us the real rules of life of those men, or are only a literary pose. In the Renaissance, and since then, men educated in the classics have been influenced by them in regard to their standards of noble and praiseworthy character, and of what should be cultivated in thought and conduct. Such men have had a common stock of quotations, of accepted views in life philosophy, and of current ethical opinions. This stock, however, has been common to the members of the technical guild of the learned. It has never affected the masses. Amongst Protestants the Bible has, in the last four hundred years,

furnished a common stock of history and anecdote, and has also furnished phrases and current quotations familiar to all classes. It has furnished codes and standards which none dared to disavow, and the suggestion of which has been overpowering. The effect on popular mores has been very great.

172. Symbols,, pictures. Before the ability to read became general art was employed in the form of symbols to carry suggestion. Symbolic acts were employed in trade and contracts, in marriage and religion. For us writing has taken the place of